

# The Last Stroke.

BY LAWRENCE L. LYNCH,

Author of "A Woman's Crime," "John Arthur's Ward,"  
"The Diamond Coterie," "Against Odds," Etc.

CONTINUED

His first movement after the three had breakfasted was to ask for the keys of the cottage chambers, for they had been handed over to Brierly somewhat ostentatiously in the presence of Mrs. Fry and at the foot of the cottage stairs, by the doctor. "I want to spend another half hour in these rooms," he said, "and to leave them that I shall know at once if a human foot has so much as crossed the threshold."

This was all the explanation he chose to make then or upon his return.

Indeed, when he came back he spent all of the remaining time until high noon, smoking alone upon the doctor's neat lawn and along the shady side of the house, excusing himself and guarding against possible intrusion, by remarking that he felt the need of a little solitary communion. At luncheon the question of the burial was discussed, and afterward Brierly announced his intentions to call upon Miss Grant, if the doctor thought her able to receive him.

"I have told Mrs. Marcy to keep the gossip out," Doctor Barnes said gravely, "she's too sensitive. Miss Grant I mean to hear unfeigned or curious discussions of the case. But a friend who is in sympathy—that's another thing. She'll be better with such company than alone."

When Brierly had set out, the detective threw away his after dinner cigar.

"Were you called to see the little lady who was taken ill here yesterday, after the close of the inquest?" he asked carelessly. "I forgot to inquire, in my desire to keep Brierly occupied."

The doctor shook his head. "I fancy she only needed time to recover from the effect of her gruesome position. It was a blunder, putting her in plain sight of that shrouded corpse. Those little blue-eyed women are a mass of nerves and fine sensibilities. Often, I don't see how it came about."

"If you mean the blunder of putting those ladies where they were, it was I who blundered. I arranged to place them there."

"You?" the doctor's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "Then I retract. It was I who have blundered."

"Um—I am not so sure," Ferrars replied slowly and then the subject as by mutual consent was ignored between them. Ferrars, who seemed for the time at least to have done his thinking, wrote several letters at the doctor's desk, and then prepared to go out.

"I asked permission to call and inquire after Mrs. Jamieson's health, yesterday," he said to the doctor, "and as she has not required your services she may be able to receive me now."

"There is another Esculapian in Glenville," reminded Dr. Barnes. "So I have heard; but the lady is a person of good taste. She would have called you in if anyone. He bowed and went out with a gleam of humor in his eyes."

"It's sometimes hard to guess what Ferrars means when he speaks with that queer look and tone," mused the doctor. "And who would have thought he would care or think of a formal call like this just now? And yet, that little woman is pretty enough to attract a man. I'm sure, and a detective may be as susceptible, I suppose, as another."

Ferrars waited for a few moments

as she received word of the Glenville house, and was then conducted to the pretty suite occupied by Mrs. Jamieson. He found her half reclining in a long, low chair, with her friend, Mrs. Arthur, still in attendance. She wore a soft, loose robe of black, with billowy gauze-like ruffles, and floating ribbons of the same sable hue, relieved only by a knot of purple wood violets at her throat. Her face was very pale and her eyes, with their changing lights of grayish green and glinting blue, looking larger and deeper than usual because of the dark shadows beneath them, and the waves of her plentiful fair hair falling low and loose upon her forehead.

She welcomed her visitor with a faint half smile, and thanked him again for his kindness of the previous day. She blamed herself for her want of nerve and courage. She inquired after Miss Grant and expressed her sympathy for the bereaved girl, and her desire to see her again, to know her, and serve her if possible; she had shown herself so brave, yet so womanly that day—And then the little lady told of her encounter with Miss Grant in the unfortunate character of messenger or bearer of bad news. She was glad there would be no lack of staunch friends to support the sweet girl in her time of need and trouble, and she finished by sending a message to Hilda, and then without further question or comment concerning the murder or the progress of the case, she let the talk slip into the hands of her friend and leaned back in her chair like one too weak for further effort, seeing which Ferrars soon withdrew.

"You will not consider this an example of my usual hospitality, I trust," Mrs. Jamieson said, as he bent over her chair to say farewell. "I fear I was not wise in refusing to let them tell a physician, but I do dread being in the hands of a doctor. I shall be pleased to hear how this sad case progresses. Mr. Grant, and by the by, has anything new occurred since the inquest? Any new witnesses or discoveries of any sort?"

But Ferrars shook his head and murmured, something about time being short, and not taxing her good nature and strength further, he bowed low and went away.

"It's very good of her," he mused, as he went, "to take such kindly interest in my supposed relative, Miss Grant. But she certainly showed scant interest in the chief actor in the drama, my friend Brierly."

The candles had just been lighted that evening, and Ferrars was once more waiting at the doctor's desk, while Brierly, pale and heavy-eyed, lounged by the long window, near when Doctor Barnes came in, hat in hand.

"As you felt some interest in Mrs. Jamieson's selection of a physician this morning," the latter said, "I will inform you that I have just been summoned to see that lady, professionally, of course," he added, as if by an afterthought and smiling slightly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Jamieson has vindicated my belief in her good judgment," replied Ferrars, and then he wheeled about in his chair, and put out a detaining hand.

"Don't think I doubt your reserve, doctor," he went on, "but I ask you to avoid or evade, if needful, any discussion of this affair of ours. That is, avoid giving any information, be it ever so trivial. He shot a quick glance toward Brierly, and met the doctor's eye for one swift momentary glance.

"My visit will be purely professional, and doubtless brief," was the reply, as the speaker passed from the room, and Ferrars smiled, knowing that his friend understood the meaning behind the half jesting words.

A moment later Robert Brierly arose, yawned, and crossed the room to take up his hat.

"This inaction is horrible," he said, drearily. "I must get out. I wish I had walked down with Barnes. Won't you come out with me, Mr. Ferrars?"

The detective dipped his pen in the sand box and arose quickly. Then when he had found his hat, and had lowered the light over the writing table, he put a hand upon the other's shoulder.

"I'll go out with you, of course, Brierly," he said, and there was a world of sympathy, as well as complete understanding in his tone. "But first, I want to ask you to show yourself as little as possible upon the streets, for a few days to come at least, and to go only in the company of the doctor or myself, and not go out evenings at all, unless similarly attended. It will be irksome, I know, but I believe it important, and I must ask this of you, too, without explanation, for the present at least."

The young man looked at him for a moment, earnestly and in silence.

"Do you ask this for reasons personal to myself, or because it seems to you to be for the interest of the investigation?" he asked slowly.

Ferrars smiled. "You're as able to take care of yourself as any man I know," he said, with frank conviction. "It's for the interest of the case that we— and especially you—keep ourselves as much aloof as possible from questions and curiosity. There is another reason which I cannot give just yet."

"I have, yes. Glenville must know what we wish it to know, and not a syllable more."

"Ah! I like that."

"Because it sounds as if you have really found the end of your thread here."

"Oh, yes. The beginning is here. Not of the case, mind; only of the clues. But heaven only knows where it may lead us before we find the end."

"What matters," said the brother of Charles Brierly, with a heavy sigh, "so long as it brings us to the truth!"

## CHAPTER XII.

On the fourth day after Charles Brierly's untimely death, his body was taken to the city and laid beside his parents in the beautiful cemetery where love and grief had already prepared for him and his, a place of final rest.

News of the burial had been sent ahead, and a crowd of friends had assembled at the home of their father's oldest friend and family lawyer, where the body was received as that of a son, and the last rites of affection and respect were performed by the venerable rector who had seen the brothers grow from boys to men.

Doctor Barnes and Hilda Grant, with Mrs. Marcy as chaperone, accompanied the sad hearted brother upon this journey, and they were somewhat surprised when Ferrars, whom they had thought must go with them in his character of sole relative to the young lady, explained that his presence in Glenville just then was essential to the success of the work he had been called there to do.

"There are so many little things which I want to learn," he said. "In fact, I must know Glenville much better before I can go far in my search, and during your absence can find time for making new acquaintances and I mean to begin by cultivating your friend Doran, doctor."

They were gone three days, and when they returned they were but a party of three. "Poor Charles Brierly," as his friends in the city had already begun to call the dead, lay in his last, quiet earthly home, and Robert had remained in the city.

"To settle up his brother's affairs, and put the matter of his death into the hands of the detectives." At least this is what Mr. Doran informed one of the loungers who, seeing the return of the doctor and the two ladies, had remarked upon Brierly's absence.

"Of course he'll have to come back here," Doran further added. "He can't touch the things in his brother's rooms yet, they say. But they'll wait, better than the other business."

"Umph!" the villager sniffed. "He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident, and then, this is just between you and me, Jones, didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By cracker! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say that they was an 'nervin' round at the doctor's that live long night!"

"He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident, and then, this is just between you and me, Jones, didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By cracker! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say that they was an 'nervin' round at the doctor's that live long night!"

"He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident, and then, this is just between you and me, Jones, didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By cracker! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say that they was an 'nervin' round at the doctor's that live long night!"

"He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident, and then, this is just between you and me, Jones, didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By cracker! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say that they was an 'nervin' round at the doctor's that live long night!"

"He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident, and then, this is just between you and me, Jones, didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By cracker! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say that they was an 'nervin' round at the doctor's that live long night!"

"He's let three days slip by without making much of a stir. Why on earth don't they had one of them fellows down here long before this? They don't seem to hurry much."

# The Christmas Sister

By HOWARD FIELDING...

Copyright, 1908, by C. N. Lurie

CONCLUDED

On Christmas day Hilda woke to find the plain room from which we dared not yet remove her bright with many flowers which the nurse had softly set in their places. This was the best day that Hilda had had since the beginning of her illness. The tide of returning health had begun to run strong, and so we were able to make it something like a real Christmas without risk of harm. But the climax was reserved for the evening, after Hilda had had her supper. Then the lights were extinguished, the door was opened and in there walked a Christmas tree, apparently upon its own legs, but really propelled by the servicable Connor. It blazed with candles and glittered with tinsel, and its boughs were well laden—better, indeed, than I was aware of—the wise Mrs. Gilbert had bought some gifts for me from Hilda that the dear girl might not lack the pleasure of giving.

I have never seen upon the face of any grown person such an expression of entrancement in pure joy as glowed on Hilda's in the light of the shining tree. At the sight of it I lost my sense of shame and deception, and a child-like faith took hold upon me that this would all come right and that I should find a way to make her happy all her life.

By the next day, however, I had recovered some part of my common sense, and the difficulties of the situation were clear to me again, but the path of escape from them was not clear at all. I spent that day chiefly in meditation and the next as well. Then a voice seemed to tell me that I needed the counsel of a woman, and whom could I appeal to but Mrs. Gilbert? By this time Hilda had been transferred to the Gilbert residence, a favor too great to be accepted by a young lady whose brother owns half of a very productive gold mine. I secured a private interview with Mrs. Gilbert and disclosed to her the truth.

"Oh, impossible, impossible!" she cried. "Why, you seem to know each other at the very first glance?"

"As I was five years old when I last saw my sister and she was barely one," said I. "A recognition would not amount to very much, even if it had occurred."

"Ah, but there's instinct," Mrs. Gilbert said I gently, "there is no more chance that I am this young lady's brother than if I were the bearded aoudad in the Central park zoo."

"But what shall we do?" she exclaimed. "Indeed, this is a very delicate matter. We cannot tell her now. She would not remain in this house. I know her. She has the strictest ideas about incurring obligations. She would rather die in the street."

At this I went into a panic and vowed that I would keep up the deception to my last hour on earth though it should sink my soul beneath the reach of mercy.

A few days later Connor came to my rooms with a very long face.

"There really is a snag in our story," said he. "Why in blazes did those Newfoundland Grays keep this thing so quiet? Why didn't your uncle find his little niece? It is inconceivable that the Grays did not get a list of the Delphic passengers. That would have told them plainly who their foundling was. She couldn't be anybody else, and surely they must have known that your uncle (whose name, with yours, was in every account of the wreck) would pay them handsomely for bringing the little girl to him. Didn't your uncle leave any papers, diaries or records of any kind which might throw some light on this matter?"

"All my uncle's private papers," said I, "were taken in charge by Judge Mahlon of the supreme court. He's dead, but I'll write to his son Jim to have the house looked over."

I did so and received next day this telegram:

Sent volume your uncle's diary 1887, containing full explanation of this affair to Mrs. Gilbert, Dec. 25. I didn't tell you this. Understand? J. M.

Naturally I called upon Mrs. Gilbert, but the lady was from home. I would have gone away, but a beloved voice floated down to me as I stood in the hall.

"Go into the drawing room," it said. "I will come to you."

So I must meet Hilda without knowing what Mrs. Gilbert knew. A cold chill struck upon me. Dec. 26! That was days and days ago, and all this time Mrs. Gilbert had been urging me to treat Hilda as a sister. Was it possible that I could be mistaken? No; surely not. Whatever Mrs. Gilbert might have learned, it couldn't have altered the laws of nature or undone the divine handiwork. And yet I would have given much for a few words with Mrs. Gilbert. It was Hilda, however, who appeared.

This was the first time to my knowledge that she had ventured so far as the drawing room, yet she walked without a sign of weakness and with

a noble carriage. And, oh, she was beautiful beyond dreams.

She wore a sort of tea gown, I suppose it might be called, of green fabric, and she carried a small black book. I think my mouth must have fallen open like a dead man's when I saw the figures 1887 in gilt upon the book's cover. My uncle's diary!

"Hilda," said I, without pause or preface, "I know what that book is. Tell me what you have found in it. Please tell me straight away."

Her blue eyes opened a bit wider. She looked at me, then down at the book and then at me again.

"Why, I haven't found anything," she said. "I just got it this minute. A maid gave it to me. I haven't even opened it."

Mrs. Gilbert's maid, under orders, had been waiting for my arrival, of course. What did it mean?

"That is a volume of my uncle's diary," said I. "Beyond question we shall find here the answer to our riddle, the solution of all our doubts."

I took it from her hand.

"The early June dates should be the ones," said I and would have opened the book, but Hilda's hands closed suddenly upon it.

"Oh, not yet," she said faintly. "Somehow I—I dread it."

The palms of my hands were wet, and I was swallowing air, but I managed to summon up the appearance of calmness.

"What do you expect to find here?" I asked.

"Oh, you will think very meanly of me," she cried, "but, indeed, I have been overpersuaded and silenced since the very first hour. Then for just that earliest hour I believed, but never afterward. And I have drifted on and on, not knowing what to do. I could see no escape from the evidence, and you were so sure."

"Did Mrs. Gilbert tell you that?"

"Why, yes, but I'd have known that you believed without a word from her. You were such a good brother." And she smiled through her tears. "But I knew in my own heart."

"Listen," said I. "Answer me. Did you wish to believe? This may be our very last minute. I think this book can never convince either of us, surely not me, unless it tells me who you really are. But, remember, it may part us forever. I have known from the first instant, and I know now, and I always shall know, that we are no more to each other than cousins through Adam; and so I ask you, do you wish to believe?"

"I think not," she whispered, with white lips. "The book."

It opened under my hand at the pages headed June 4 and June 5, and under the first of these dates I read the following in my uncle's hand:

"Captain Enos Gray and his wife came today, bringing the child. It has blue eyes and bright golden hair. It could hardly be more unlike poor little Hilda, who had my dear sister's coloring, brown eyes and dark hair. Description had quite prepared me for this, yet I would take no risk of error and therefore had the child brought to me. If this child really came from the Delphic I think it is the supposed son of First Officer Alston, whose body was found with it upon the raft. According to the list, there were on the Delphic 'Charles Alston (infant) and, of course, I think that 'Charles' is the same as the 'Charles' who was found on the raft. 'Charles' is common in England, and not for Charles. I shall institute inquiries." Then, evidently written later:

"Lieutenant Alston seems to have had not a relative in the world. The child is undoubtedly his, but it will not be claimed by any one. I have decided to send \$20 a month to the Grays for its support. This will give its life an added value to them, and they will rear it more carefully."

Here were all mysteries explained. The child was kept carefully and somewhat secretly because it was a source of revenue. At my uncle's death the income ceased, and a stranger was permitted to take the child away.

"I have a name for you at last," said I. "Not my sister's, Charlotte!"

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"I would like Hilda better," said she softly. "You called me that first."

"Mrs. Gilbert has had this book since the day after Christmas," said I. "For the next at the latest. Why did she hold it?"

"Perhaps she wanted us to wait a little."

"Perhaps," said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other."

"We must always be very kind and sweet to her," said Hilda.

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be very kind and sweet to her,' said Hilda."

"Charlotte?" said I, "she saw just the very truth, that we loved each other. 'We must always be